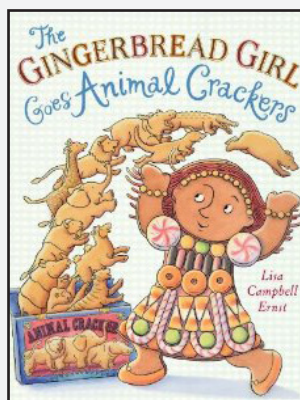


Second Reaction: A Delightful Twist on a Childhood Favorite

Campbell Ernst, Lisa. *The Gingerbread Girl Goes Animal Crackers*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2011.

Mary Schwartz



What child doesn't love stories that involve cookies and candy? *The Gingerbread Girl Goes Animal Crackers* by Lisa Campbell Ernst is a delightful twist on a familiar tale. The old man and woman who baked Gingerbread Girl gave her animal crackers as a birthday gift. As soon as she opened the box, the animal crackers took off running. As they ran, they were pursued by farmers, a cat, a flock of sheep, a hen and her chicks, and even a scout troop. Of course, Gingerbread Girl was also in pursuit to save them from becoming a snack. In the end, the clever girl outsmarted the fox again just in time to save her new friends.

The illustrations contain beautiful pastel backgrounds that look like gingham fabric, and they depict all the characters in the chase across the tops of the pages. I shared this story with my twenty-one first-grade students. As soon as I showed them the cover, they began excitedly talking about the first story and how Gingerbread Girl cleverly used licorice whip hair to tie up the fox's jaws and not get eaten like her brother. They couldn't wait to see what was going to happen in this adventure. So, of course, we had to do a picture walk as well as some predicting before beginning to read. They had many different ideas, but they all agreed that the fox would try to eat the animal crackers.

The text's language is rich with words that easily framed a vocabulary lesson. The students laughed when hearing a word or phrase such as *brouhaha*, *cookie chaos*, and *menagerie*. They enjoyed learning the meanings and repeating the words over and over, especially brouhaha.

The first-graders also loved the repeating refrain and joined in while getting louder each time. Also, each animal cracker sang its own special, catchy rhyme. I would say the rhyme, stopping before the end so they could finish it by shouting out the rhyming animal name. They rhymed vanilla with gorilla, flyin' with lion, hullabaloo with kangaroo, preposterous with rhinoceros, and beware with polar bear. However, they did make it clear that rant didn't rhyme very well with elephant!

We stopped often during the reading to discuss emotions that the characters might be feeling. They thought the old couple and Gingerbread Girl felt love for each other. They said that the animal crackers felt excitement in being freed from the box. They talked about how the animal crackers were afraid and wary of the fox but chose to trust him even though it was a terrible decision. And in the end, all felt relieved and grateful to be safe. One student pointed out that they were probably also exhausted. And finally, we tested our sequencing skills going back and retelling the story in the correct order.

In my classroom, we have a special read aloud time every day. As a matter of fact, it is one of my favorite times of the day, and my students would probably rank it right up there after recess. I truly believe in the importance of reading aloud to students. I think it fosters a love of literature, builds listening and comprehension skills, fosters critical thinking skills and allows me, as the reader, to model reading strategies. Humorous, predictable, and repetitive books such as *The Gingerbread Girl Goes Animal Crackers* are excellent choices for read-alouds. If you choose to read this to young children, go out and buy those cute little boxes of animal crackers first. I guarantee they will ask you for some when the story is over.

About the Author

Mary Schwartz taught kindergarten in Delphi, Indiana, and currently teaches first grade at Hershey Elementary in Lafayette, Indiana. She has been teaching for twenty-eight years.